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The Tragedy of Errors

A Dramatic Poem

Asking of the novel
and the stage
A true love
for the false love
of our age.

—Julius

Claflin

The Tragedy of Errors

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A Dramatic Poem

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PREFACE.

In spite of protests from its Author, I undertake the task of placing this Dramatic Work before the public without resorting to those multitudinous accessories which could be supplied by the theatrical profession. And though the Author has beseeched me to desist from the attempt, my strong conceit has overpowered his feeble modesty. For some time past his frequent contemplation has been the destruction of this Drama, a conception morbid from its birth. But such destruction I contend would be no less than child-murder.

"Still," he would say, when argued with from such a view, "the child is so much morbidly deformed, that when it mingles with the world 'twill be the jest of some, the scorn of others, and the stern repugnance of the world at large."

"'Tis not your fault, though, that the child is so deformed," I would reply, "For was it not born so through the laws of Nature over which you could hold no control?"

"Yes," he would then assent, "but there are few who would admit that to be true, though I should picture

them the perfect form I fancied that the brat would have. But that is not a whole consideration of the trouble; for aside from its morbid deformity, it is a bastard child."

"A satire on its mother is it not?"

* * * *

And by such arguments I have induced him to allow the introduction of my rhymes into the matter of his Drama.

And now, the Author and Myself apologizing for each other's weaknesses, it is submitted to the test which is not feared, although predicted—the jests of some, the scorn of others, and the stern repugnance of the world at large.

—*JULIUS.*

REPROACHFULLY DEDICATED

TO

"MY FOSTER MOTHER"

[SAN FRANCISCO]

Blush, strumpet "Queen of the Pacific Slope,"
For while strumpets can *blush there still is hope.*

Behind black Tamalpias sank the sun,
And San Francisco's sky was crimson dun.
Across the Bay, from Alameda's shore,
The clouds seemed like a sea of muddy gore.
One thousand female souls sank into Hell,
Without the murmur of a funeral knell.
"Nob Hill's" inhabitants could see their plight,—
But closed their eyes to hide the awful sight:
For Hell's "Dupont Street" touches "Nob Hill's" side;
And yet a gulf between them lies, as wide
As that which lay 'tween Lazarus and Dives;
But different, for here the rich man thrives.
These thousand female souls wantoned in Hell:
Five thousand men and youths beside them fell;
And ere the shrill-voiced bird announced the morn,
None know how many souls in Hell were born.
O! San Francisco, blush, if blush you can!
For there is hope while still there is a man,

Who feels he has an interest in your rule
And blushes:—be he not a self-made fool.
Through what power do these women grow so lewd.
That they will sell to men their souls for food ?
Or is it lack of power ? Ah, there 's the thought !
Had they the power, how many would have caught
The hand which left her in this foul quick-mire!
But when she fell, her lover—love's satire!
We know the rest—she plunged into despair,
Yet lived:—would life had ended there!
Her lover,—let us use the satire still,—
Continued in the ball-room ; there to fill
Another's virgin breast with—what was it?
In her chaste thoughts the lovely maid would sit,
And wonder—well, again we know the rest:
Both called themselves "in love,"—neither digressed
From what the purest novels of the day
Picture as love ; the best theatres would play
Upon the rising passions of the lovers—
—And they are married—how much that word covers!

What seek our lovers when, with passions high,
They court each other for the marriage tie?
Ah, many a parent, with the passion past,
Has when too late, this simple question asked.
Why hide the misery of such lives away?
That there are many, none can well gain-say:
But lovers, married, would not lead such lives,
If schooled in love, wherein *all* pleasure thrives,
By casting from the novel and the stage,
For a true love, the false love of our age.

THE TRAGEDY OF ERRORS

A DRAMATIC POEM

Life's theater in darkness: from the stage:

" Do you think Walton loves your mother more
Than when he married her ten years ago? "
" Yes; for he then had no true love for her."
" What do you call the strong attraction which
Was thought to be true love, but which was not? "
" A simple fascination which the charms
Of social life excited; nothing more.
This fascination withered, and true love
Was not formed till the fascination died."
" It's time Society ceased to regard
An amorous fascination as true love!"
" Dear Roger, we know what it is, I'm sure."
" Yes Gladys, my sweet wife! Shall we retire?"
" Yes: let us go to sleep and dream—"
" That your dear mother, Margaret Kent, will live
The errors of her life again!"

* * * * *

The sunlight of twelve backward years
Bursts through the darkness, and then fades away.
Strange noises fill Imagination's ears,

And Fancy's eyes are filled, while tempered day
Reveals the æsthetic home of Margaret Kent.
Her daughter, Gladys—eight years old—is bent
With painful grace above a manuscript.
Her emptied pen into the ink is dipped,
When Roger Charlton enters—there 'tis left.

"Oh, Mr. Charlton, don't tell anyone!"
She tries to hide her manuscript,
And from her lips a kiss is sipped:—
"Don't *you* tell anyone!"
The lips raised by the kiss then pout,—
"Now you've seen everything!"
He fails to make her meaning out:—
"I've seen your love; that might be everything to me."
"Oh, but you saw the letter I was writing, didn't you?"
She has assumed a frightened air,
And Charlton gently strokes her hair:—
"Gladys, if you were older, I should say, your manner gives yourself away! Love-letter!—Hey?"
"Ye–es."
Reluctantly she gives it him:
He with expectancy is grim:—
"Should I find it for some one else, and some one else find it for me, we'd each put out the other's eyes; 'fore either one could see if for him or the other you intended it to be."
In confidence she lifts her face:—
"I wanted you to have it, but—not yet."
And he removes each wrinkle's trace:
"Then you intended it for me! Sweetheart, won't we make love romantic? Truly this (*kisses her*). We soil love's romance every time we kiss!—but can't you let me have the letter now?"
With fearful sympathy she speaks:—

"Oh, I've not written it to you!"

And he exaggerates Love's freaks:—

"Horrors! My heart will burst with jealousy. You said it was for me to see—I thought of course it was for me! What! read it now? Well, hardly. We will have no friendly rivalry."

He takes his cloak and starts to go,
But Gladys' face beseeches, "No!"

"Do wait a moment! I want you to help me send it, please."

'Tis sport for him; but pain for her:—

"I help you send it to another? You're a heartless sweet! Then may I ask of you, 'Whom is it written to?'"

Deep in her breast convulsions stir:—

"To my – papa."

Charlton, frowning, drops his cloak:

"Gladys, what do you know about your father, please?"

And she replies in tones which choke:—

"Only what dear mamma sobs in the night."

"Tut! tut!"

"Last night I woke up in the dark, and poor mamma was praying here. She didn't seem to know her voice and everything was very strange. It seemed so awful, too, when all was still. I couldn't speak a single word, and so I crept from bed and came and kissed her cheek. She didn't even notice me, but cried so hard that finally she went to sleep and left me standing there beside her in the dark till morning came. I never, never, can forget that night. So I have written him to come. Please read my letter! Here it is."

Charlton, with an effort, yawns,
While this truth upon him dawns :—

" My scheme is rotten if it does not hatch to-night ! "

" It isn't very long because I can't write very well."

(*His eyes then try to follow where she moves her finger through the air.*)

" I told just how I dreamed of him, of what he looked like, and of what he was, and how I longed for him, and how I loved him as my dear papa. And then I told how lonely mamma was, and how she called for him at night, and told how happy we would be if he would come to us. I said that I thought *I* was worth his coming home to see ; and wondered why he didn't come . You see, I've been explaining as you read, so if you found a word you couldn't read, you would know what it was from hearing me tell you. I guess that he can read it, though."

He asks her—staring vacantly at space,—

" Do you know where to send it ? "

And she replies, awed by his solemn face,—

" Yes, it's written on an envelope—the place mamma did used to send her letters. But a day or two ago I heard her say she hasn't written him for two years now. But I don't find it on the table—here ! it's fallen on the floor. Oh, Mr. Charlton, now what have you done ? "

" I've spilled the ink, and it is streaked along your dress."

" And now mamma will ask how it was done, and I will have to tell her every single thing, when it was to have been my secret ! Oh, what shall I do ? "

" Just tell her how I spilled the ink, directing a letter to a friend of mine."

" Wouldn't that be a lie ? "

At his stern answer Gladys' features seemed to freeze.

"Yes, it would be a lie, for Robert Kent is not a friend of mine! Have you another apron just like this?"

"Yes, I have three of them."

"Then give me this, and I will have another made so near like it no one can tell the difference. It's not stained through on to your dress, and not a drop went on the carpet. Hurry, darling, get your apron off, and I'll address the letter while your gone." *(Gladys quickly leaves the room.)* "Now let me see if I can streak another drop of ink! *(writes)* 'Robert Kent, care of ———, Rio Janeiro, South America.' *(With the letter at arm's length.)* Through you I will give God the means to thwart my schemes. *(Gladys enters, having cast the Holland apron from her dress.)* You've shed your chrysalis as it were! Now sign your name, and I will mail the letter for you, dear. But let me take the apron, here."

With painful features Gladys signs;

And Charlton asks, for his designs,—

"Let's see! How shall I carry this?"

Gladys, every nerve confused,

Grows excited:

"Someone is coming, Mr. Charlton! Quick!"

"Give me the letter and excuse me, please!"

He steps into a corner of the room.

A woman is seen standing at the door:

"Gladys, you dear, delicious, little sweet! Is mamma in?—No salutation? well that is a cut!—Still silent? Is your mamma in?"

"N–n–n–no ma'am; she's not at home."

" That's what we call 'a chestnut' in society. No answer? Well! have I offended her?—I'll ask you plainly, then, may I come in? —Mrs. Townsend coldly treated at the door of Margaret Kent! I shall at least demand an explanation, hence I *must* come in. *(Enters.)* Oh, Roger Charlton! are you here?"

He glances at himself from neck to foot:—

" Yes, and *(his hand to Mrs. Townsend's mouth is put)* to-day I'll let them know that Robert Kent will die by my own hand if Margaret refuses to become divorced."

She points at Gladys in alarm:—

" Is it suspected I am in with you?"

For both have planned to do Kent harm:—

" Oh no, but don't be friendly, or you will be off your guard."

Miss Longstaffe enters,—Margaret's chaperon,
Her presence Mrs. T——— assumes unknown:

" Only a thief without intelligence would do what you have evidently tried to do."

And Mrs. Townsend looks at Charlton,
Who attempts to hide the apron;
Points at Gladys, who is nervous:

" I need no explanation to surmise that you have stolen something from this child."

Stern Miss Longstaffe remarks, quite unsuspectingly:—

" A strong imagination is guided by its own propensities, but mine can't follow yours. Explain."

Mrs. Townsend sees what he has hid:—

" Explain, or you will be arrested in the act."

He wishes himself of the woman rid:—

" Explain, and you will be arrested in the tongue!"

Shrewd Mrs. Townsend wants no explanations,
But merely to show no friendly relations:

" Gladys, will you tell what this thief has taken from you ?"

" I'll tell what Mr. Charlton has !"

" Excuse me, Gladys, but it really is none of Mrs. Townsend's business ; and Mrs. Townsend, I believe that Gladys will desire my friendship quite as long as yours."

She gives to him a smile behind the back
Of Miss Longstaffe, who beckons him to her.
Grave Miss Longstaffe and Charlton leave the room.

" Well, well, my little dear, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings so ! Come, make a confidante of me. What is it all about ?"

" I wrote a letter to my lost papa, and Mr. Charlton said that he would mail it for me when he went."

" Come, let me see the letter, please."

" Why ! he has taken it away."

" Oh, then the letter's safe."

And Mrs. Townsend thinks she will depart.
—Poor Gladys moans, with hand upon her heart,—

" I feel as if a thunder-storm was coming up inside of me !"

Miss Longstaffe, seeming satisfied,
Returns with Charlton at her side.

" I s'pose you've heard the latest social news from our reporter,—Mrs. Townsend ? It's in the daily paper, here, of yesterday."

He speaks in anger, strolling towards the fire.
Miss Longstaffe reads a book to cool his ire.

" Well, she has written such an article, that from its import Margaret Kent and I are desperately in love, and only one conclusion can its readers reach ; that Margaret will have a scandal or a quick divorce from Robert Kent should he return from South America. Our social Modesty has grown so bold, that Curiosity now goes stark naked through our drawing-rooms in search of wanton gossip : for everybody knows that Mrs. Townsend is reporter on this paper for the social news, and yet she is received in good society. But that which stirs the furies of my mental elements, is that this article was an attempt on Mrs. Townsend's part to show to Mrs. Kent the dangerous folly of thus living a deserted wife. I will admit that she's wise in her conclusion, but think she lacks the wit to use her wisdom, for Margaret does not agree with her, and steady opposition merely makes each stronger in her own. I think if all her friends would say to Margaret Kent: 'swear that you love your husband, though you sleep to dream of his unfaithfulness, with your head pillowed on his foul disgrace : swear that you love your husband, though each morning you must bathe in memories slimy with his vile, disgusting filth : swear by your then clean honesty that dearer than your God you prize him as a fitting subject in your morning prayer of thanks for food provided by your own sweet toil, and salted with the sweat of your pure brow ; and give him glowing gratitude for turning into wine the sparkling water of his stinking vomit : your sacred duty lies in doing this. And more : when for a kiss he sweetly spits into your face tobacco juice—' "

Miss Longstaffe shuts her book with a report :—

"I beg you, Mr. Charlton, stop! the stench already's dense enough."

Young Charlton answers her, with accents short :—

"Miss Longstaffe, I love Margaret, but feel just like a cat, whom that dog, Robert Kent, has driven up a friendly pole, to which I cling!"

Miss Longstaffe starts to read her book again :—

"You are a poled-cat, then."

And Charlton's tone begins another strain :—

"I beg your pardon if I have become offensive, Miss Longstaffe."

Miss Longstaffe sternly motions Gladys out ;
And Gladys goes the longest way about.

"Then think of this : the more offensiveness you throw on him, the more offensive you yourself become."

Charlton bows his head; then raises it.
—His voice seems rising from his stomach's pit :—

"I wish to be despised by you. Now listen: Margaret still clings to Robert Kent by what she calls a love of honor, not a love for him, and she bids fair to sacrifice her entire life to that one selfish sentiment. I have resolved it shall no longer be. She thinks that only death should cancel obligations of the marriage vows, and if to-day she still persists in playing martyr to that thought, I have resolved to take the death of Robert Kent upon my soul, but that once done, I never more can be the lover I have been. I do not wish that Margaret should ever know by whose hand she was freed, and hence I shall evade the law if possible, and go away from her when it is done. She shall have satisfactory proof that Robert Kent is dead, but never need know how he met his fate."

Miss Longstaffe has arisen to her feet,
And forced young Charlton down into a seat:—

" Margaret will never be divorced from Robert Kent,—but you—*you must not* do this thing."

Gladys enters, staring at her aunt:—

" Mamma is waiting in the hall, will you please go an errand with her? It won't take you very long."

And Charlton glances back, with look askant:—

" I'd follow her into the grave to be with her."

And leaves the room:—

" What is a pole-cat, auntie, dear? Is Mr. Charlton one? "—*Is asked of Miss Longstaffe.*

Nothing yet made the woman deign to laugh:—

" Sometimes he is. Gladys, prepare the tea. I think that Mrs. Townsend will be in again to see your mother soon."

With which she leaves her,—A self-made old maid.
Gladys is now at ease,—of none afraid:—

" I wonder what a pole-cat is!—a pole-cat! It may be Mrs. Townsend will know why he is a pole-cat! The trouble is she talks so much herself, that I can't get a chance to say a word. —But I know how I'll do it!—When she asks, 'Is mamma in?' I'll answer her, 'No ma'am, she's *out* with Mr. Charlton!' Then, before she has a chance to speak a word, I'll say, 'Miss Longstaffe says he is a pole-cat. What is a pole-cat?' That's just the way we'll do! Now she'll come in the door right here,—(*opens door*) And I will say, 'Why Mrs. Townsend! won't you take a chair?' Of course she'll say the thing she always does, 'Oh thanks, you dear, delicious, little sweet! Is mamma in?',—and I will say, 'No ma'am, she's *out* with Mr. Charlton. Miss Longstaffe says

he is a pole-cat. What is a pole-cat?' That's perfect. Now again: 'Why Mrs. Townsend ! won't you take a chair? "Oh thanks, you dear, delicious, little sweet ! Is mamma in?'—'No ma'am, she's *out* with Mr. Charlton. Miss Longstaffe says he is a pole-cat. What is a pole-cat?'—And now if she would come I could remember everything. (*Sits down.*) Oh, Mrs. Townsend, Mrs. Townsend, I do, *do* wish you'd come."

Her wish is granted speedily,
For Mrs. Townsend enters:

"You dear, delicious, little sweet ! then you do love to have me come ; and you've been waiting for me and (*taking Gladys in her lap she sits down in Gladys' chair*) did you get angry with me 'cause I didn't come right back ? Here dearest give me one big kiss ! "

Gladys, bewildered with surprise,
Recalls her cue and tries to rise:

"Why, why Mrs. Townsend ! won't you take a chair ? "

"What, darling ! Have I taken yours ? Well, you'll forgive me, won't you, dear? You are receiving callers all alone, and so of course must keep your dignity. You are too irresistable ! "

"(I wish you'd ask, 'Is mamma in ? ') "

"And may I stay awhile ? "

"Yes. Uncle Olney Kent comes in on Tuesday afternoons, and you're a little late, but I don't think he'll mind. Miss Longstaffe says — "

"You say that Olney Kent comes in on Tuesday afternoons ! Is he the poet, known as 'Mr. Bell ? "

"Yes ma'am. Miss Longstaffe says — "

"Then I will learn to-day if he repents his treatment of

me yet! I dare say that your pretty mamma is beseiged with gentlemen ?"

" Beseiged ?"

" I mean that many gentlemen come here to see her."

" Yes, there do. Miss Longstaffe says — "

" Tell me about them dear, who are they all ?"

" Oh, there are many of them and I don't remember all the names. There's Uncle Olney Kent and Colonel Weir and Mr. Charlton, Tom Updegraeffe and George —Oh, I forget who they all are."

" And so your mamma's *in* with all of these fine gentlemen ?"

" No ma'am, she's *out* with Mr. Charlton. She says he is a pole-cat — "

Gladys, having got this far,
Forgets what she was after
And Mrs. Townsend passes on
With a merry, rippling laughter :—

" What! what! she's fallen out with Charlton ? She says he is a pole-cat ? How she hates him then ! He has told her his intentions regarding Robert Kent. Well, I'll take care that no suspicions fall on me."

" They're coming now."

" What ! They're together yet ? "

A moment's pause—and Margaret enters, smiling
On Charlton, whom she seemed to be reviling :—

" Don't you know Mr. Charlton, Lilly ? I thought you were acquainted."

Margaret asks, and Mrs. Townsend bows
To Charlton while her face no smile allows :

" I never yet have had the honor of an intimate acquaintance. But I've heard much of him ; for let me warn you that your little Gladys, here, is something of a

spy between yourself and your adorers. She just now left with me the burden of a secret that concerns you both."

Charlton, disgusted with her bold deceit
In playing they are strangers, speaks :—

"You say the secret is a burden! Can't we help you bear it then? give us some clue. What is it like?"

"Gladys compared the substance of it to a – a skunk."

"No wonder that you quickly tire of such a burden and wish to shift it onto us."

"You don't believe in bearing other's burdens, then?"

Margaret, disgusted with them both,
Withdraws; and Charlton grows more wroth:

"Well that depends. We have before us an example in a woman burdened with a ——— too vile to name! Good common sense would say to merely drop the thing, as foolishness to longer carry it. What say you, Margaret? Oh!"

"Ah, Charlton, what a wit you have! Of course you now refer to Margaret being burdened with her husband, and I agree with you, he is a ———, and Margaret is really a fool to carry such a burden as he is."

Gladys speaks: the clouding atmosphere
Announces that her thunderstorm is near:

"I wish you'd go!"

And Charlton, following the lightning dart,
Thunders—to quail the woman's heart:

"Not one word more. Remember that you are her guest and she her mistress, though she be his wife; and as her mistress, she should guide herself in being what his wife should be, her husband's honored mistress, and she just said to me that not until her honor leaves, will she leave Robert Kent."

The clouds seem parted with sunlight,
As Margaret illumes the scene :—

" My honored duty is to honor him by still acknowledging 'I am his wife.' "

Another flash from Gladys lights a cloud :

" Oh, Mrs. Townsend, I do – *do* wish you'd *go* ! "

Again the storm hangs over like a shroud :

" I beg your pardon, but I thought you didn't care for him, since he's deserted you for these six years."

Gladys' stern face suddenly grows milder ;
And as she leaves the room each step grows wilder :—

" (Oh, I know how to make her go !) "

Margaret's face seems made of alabaster,
As she replies :—

" I do not care for him, but he is still alive—is my child's father, and as the father of my child, I shall acknowledge him to be my husband, for the child is witness of a love that only death should violate. Father and mother should be man and wife while both are on this earth."

But Mrs. Townsend will not be subdued:—

" And you consider that the law which grants them a divorce should be repealed ? "

Margaret seems with a Divinity imbued:—

" The law should have the power to separate them, but it should not give the right to marry while the other lives."

Charlton speaks as a philosopher:—

" I think the law should have the power to separate them, and that to the guilty one it should not give the right to marry for the second time, but to the one who has not sinned, re-marriage is a question in which conscience should decide."

And she replies :

"Then I'm decided that his death or mine alone can break our marriage chains."

Grim Charlton shut his jaws so tight they crack,
But Mrs. Townsend smiles behind his back:

"You're sure it is not pride which makes you shrink from a divorce?"

"It is not pride; for pride would spurn the life which I now lead. How could I be humiliated more than by the fact that Robert Kent is my acknowledged husband? It is a simple love of honor and respect which I owe to myself for having been, and being, what I am to him: a power which has changed and *will* change his life to something better than it would have been had he not known the love of Margaret Kent."

Mrs. Townsend gives his back another smile,
And adds,—continuing to beguile:—

"You search for honor in humiliation."

But Charlton whispers, as the light words pass:—

"(You're balking my scheme now; you treacherous ass!) We need not argue more. As Margaret believes that only death should stain the sacred purity of marriage vows, the pure humiliation of her martyrdom to that belief reflects her spotless honor."

The shrewd woman fears future questions whether
She and Charlton ever schemed together:—

"It's strange that you should talk like this, when evidently you would gladly take her for your wife if she was free."

Margaret looks as,—with a bound—
A stag might look back at a hound:—

"Do not again insult the love of Roger Charlton and myself!"

Gladys enters, leading Miss Longstaffe;
And Mrs. Townsend, turning at the sound,
Attempts to lick her hand—as might a hound:—

"A very pleasant evening Miss Longstaffe!"

Miss Longstaffe, taking with a sweeping glance
The situation, sees at once her chance:—

"I hardly think *you* think so. Mr. Charlton, will you sing for us? Choose any of your songs: it doesn't matter which."

She takes her instrument—a violin—
And Margaret the piano:—they begin:—

"Suppose I give you one entitled 'The Untold Secret of a Gossip-Monger?'"

Again disgusted, Margaret leaves the room.
The evening shadows darken to a gloom.

"I don't know it. Please sing, 'I stood on the Bridge at Midnight, while'"—

"I'll sing 'I Stood on Ceremony, while she stood on toe, for I was too polite to say, I wish that you would go.'"

He looks at Mrs. Townsend with a glare.
She lightly laughs; but meets him with a stare:—

"I think it time that I am moving on. Good afternoon!"

"Good-night!"

And Mrs. Townsend leaves the room.

"I must say, Mr. Charlton, that I think your hint was rather coarse."

"When she was coarse, why should it have been otherwise?"

"If left with me it would have been—"

"Refined upon your violin, till it became invisible!"

Margaret enters, with an injured air,
Expecting to see Mrs. Townsend there.

"She raises in me all the furies of a female mind. She asks for facts which fret me, and gives those truths

which gall me. She feels herself above me, but one can see the stilts on which she walks, for she is a reporter in disguise, and makes her cash in speculative gossip, while I make mine in speculative poetry. But after all, it is a question which the world desires the most. I half believe that if we get to heaven, she will be in more demand than I."

Margaret settles in the sofa's furs,
And Gladys comes and lays a hand in hers:—

"And do you think I will be wanted there, mamma?"

"Yes, darling, for the guardian of my conscience. I can hold my temper if I merely look at you. Yet it's my jealousy that is excited: for her occupation carries her into society, while I must sit alone here evening after evening to compose my fifteen dollar sonnets."

Charlton comes and sits down by her side,
And loving Gladys hugs him like a bride:—

"A sonnet ought to bring you fifty dollars, Margaret!"

"I wish you were an editor, for never did we need the money more than now. Our European trip with you had nearly ruined us, and fitting up these rooms has quite completed it. Miss Longstaffe's pictures ought to sell. She now has two or three at Bernhart's which really should take the eye of connoisseurs."

"At Bernhart's! Ah! Why not display them at 'The Fair?' They might 'take' well."

"I'd like to see them take a farewell: we need the money now."

"I think I'll take *my* farewell, with hearty wishes for their wellfare. I'd like to be excused from tea. By Time's immortal age! it's getting late. Come, I'll be off!"

"Well, come in often."

"Can I come oftener when I come oftenest now?"

"Cannot the best be bettered?"

"The best bread can be buttered?"

"But see if you cannot be better bred, and not resist my hospitality. Good-night!"

"Good-night your Wittiness! Here Gladys, one last kiss!"

Miss Longstaffe has been plunged in painful thought,
A state which Charlton's threat toward Kent had wrought;—
She rises in a half-uncertain way,
As if not yet decided what to say:—

"Mr. Charlton! —"

"Ye-es?"

"Well, never mind. Good-night!"

Charlton gives one lingering look around,
Then sadly bends his sight toward the ground:—

"Good-night."

Gladys notes the sadness of his eye,
And follows him when he has passed her by.
When both have gone Miss Longstaffe's voice begins
As though her every nerve was pricked with pins:—

"I dislike them all, and Charlton in particular, who now will buy my pictures, and on whose charity we'll live for months to come. How could you give that hint?"

"'Twas easier to give that single hint than write a poem full of them, and probably more lucrative. We're suffering from poverty, he is immensely rich, and he enjoys the giving more than we do the receiving it. Nor is it charity; because we give the pictures, which are fully worth all we receive for them. We'll never take a penny which we do not earn."

"But when you gave that hint, where was your pride?"

"Invested in the future lucrative returns."

"Your pride should be invested in yourself."

"My head's not thick enough to keep it in. All my emotions, thoughts, and sentiments escape in spite of me."

"But you should check them, Margaret."

"How? Check them as phrenologists would do, by *labeling* every faculty, and learning in explicit terms its use, its quantity and quality, with recipes for mixing faculties in order to make money, friends, honor, love, or anything desired? I hate such method in one's madness. Give me Nature's orderly confusion!"

"And do you think it always ends in harmony?"

Some one is softly tapping at the door.
Miss Longstaffe quickly rises, but before
She opens, waits for Margaret's reply;
And Margaret answers,—with a weary sigh:—

"Let my death answer you."

A fine old man, with nearly snow-white hair,
Has entered. Miss Longstaffe has gone.

"Oh, Uncle Olney! I had feared that you would not come in this afternoon."

"I came *not* in, yet I *am* in. 'Canst fathom that?'"

"I cannot with my senses. No."

"Coming to your door awhile ago, I heard so many voices that I crept away; but found I couldn't bear the disappointment of not seeing you, and so have come again. Are you alone?"

"I think so. All the company and Miss Longstaffe have gone."

She draws a large armchair up to the fire,
And there invites the somewhat feeble sire.

"Now that I'm getting old, I sometimes think that

Providence provides for me when I cannot; for I have tried to find you thus alone, and failed. Yes, let me sit down by the fire, for I am feeble, and have not recovered from my sickness yet. Margaret, we have had many secret confidences in the past, but I now wish to tell you something which before I have not had the heart to do. Come, sit by me, and let me hold your hand."

Margaret draws a stool up to his feet,
And sweetly settles on the humble seat.

"Margaret, can you imagine that a man like me, regarded as a confirmed bachelor, could love?"

She glances up at him with childish face:—

"Oh, dear, you must not speak like this. You know my situation. We can be the warmest friends, and you have always been to me the dearest one, but do not speak of love."

And he replies, with yet unhardened grace:—

"You quite misunderstand me, Margaret. I will explain by saying that I am *no* bachelor."

"I always thought you an unmarried man!"

"And so I am."

"If you are not a bachelor, nor a married man, what are you then in this respect?"

"Simply an unmarried man."

"Then I should say you were a bachelor!"

"I dropped that title when I married."

"You said you were unmarried, though!"

"My marriage was undone, and I thereby unmarried."

"Oh, dear, I might have thought of that! Is she alive or dead?"

"I just heard,—through this letter,— that she has been

dead for some time past. When many years had flown above our married life, she had another love, and in that way divorced herself from me: for when the sacredness of marriage is polluted, every bond of God is cleft in twain."

"But were you ever legally divorced from her?"

"Yes: let no man join what God hath put asunder."

"What do you think of my position, then?"

"Published in the daily *Chronicle* of yesterday, I saw an article, connecting you with Roger Charlton, which caused my watery blood to boil as it had never done for years before; and that it was which drove me here to talk with you, and as your truest friend, who seeks alone your welfare, to ascertain the views you hold upon this subject, and to give you mine: and then, if you should see as I now do, I ask you, Margaret, to break your present chains, and link your future happiness to mine.

"I have my grand old country home; but you have not a home at all. My life is lonely; yours can be but little else. As you now stand, the dangers from these untried youths surround; but if with me, the long tried friendship of an older mind would always be around, and your sweet child would have a Paradise of Nature's purity surrounding her. I think I could supply your every want. My literary works have always lacked a central figure on which they could concentrate their power and with the moderate fame which I already have, I think I could exalt you by my love and poetry to earthly immortality. 'Tis not conceit which makes me come before these youths whose greener charms make pallid my old age, but

that I think my love could give to you more happiness than theirs. *(Mrs. Townsend has not gone as yet, and at the door takes what her ears can get.)* But whether you become my wife or not, one half my fortune I bequeath to you. *(Having heard what she desires, the woman at the door retires.)* Now let me first convince your reason that your present life is guided by mistaken views of right and wrong and then I'll leave you free to choose your future lot."

Margaret's breast has seemed to be afire:
Her words like smoke now rise toward the sire:—

"If I, this very day was free, your arms could be my heaven's boundary; for if I ever longed for freedom it was but a passing sigh for rest. But having heard me say repeatedly—that as I *am*, so must I *be*—knowing, that conscientiously, I cannot change my present life—how can you be so *cruel* as to say to me—such words as these? Do not produce your arguments. *I am, till death, the wife of Robert Kent.*"

Suddenly is heard a knocking,
The quick ear of Silence shocking.
Miss Longstaffe opens the door,
And again is seen no more.

"Why, Alex, my dear boy! What brings you here? But wait. Allow me, Mrs. Kent, to introduce to you my nephew, Dr. Walton, just arrived from Philadelphia. Alex, Mrs. Kent of whom you've heard me speak so frequently."

Mrs. Townsend is again seen to appear.
Walton and Margaret seem very queer.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Kent, if I am too abrupt. But it was necessary I should see my Uncle just as soon as possible, and, entering your house, I met a woman

at the door, who said she was a nurse from Bellevue Hospital, and that she'd brought a message for my Uncle.—Here it is."

The old man takes it with suspicious looks:—

" It bears a stamp of life and death,—a hospital !"

Young Walton's movements have too many crooks,
And Margaret is embarrassed with this man.
When their eyes met,—a momentary thing,
It startled both, as such things only can
When thoughts take flight on Fascination's wing.

" Pardon me, Mrs. Kent! Your heel is grinding in an envelope. Permit that I should pick the letter up for you. *(He hands the letter from which Kent's address Charlton had copied.—Margaret's thoughts digress from Walton,—who seems an Ideal,—to Robert Kent, who seems to her too real.—)* Uncle is in a faint! Will you assist me please? It's strange he should have fainted here. Look out! You're fainting, too!"

For Margaret is passing through
States when we neither wake nor sleep,—
Dangling in space betwixt the two,—
When now we soar;—and now we creep.
At last she finds herself awake:—

" Look at your Uncle, please."

But Walton, seemingly, his turn must take:—

" Why, I forgot about his being in a faint! What could have brought it on?"

" That message lying there, of course."

" It's strange, but I forgot about *my* message, too!"

" It's strange, but you're forgetting all about yourself."

Walton awakes himself at last,
And blushes for the moment past:—

" Come, he must need attention ! Quick ! Glance at

the message, please, and tell me what it is. It may require an answer before he revives. I'll soon revive him, though, with this ammonia."

"According to this message, his wife has been, for ten years past, the best and noblest nurse in Bellevue Hospital, but now is lying on her death-bed suffering in the horrid agonies of smallpox. She sends to him these words: 'I am descending into Hell! Have you forgiven? Answer me.'"

"I understand! The eternal misery of a dying woman turns upon a word from him. A second may extend into Eternity.—He moves his lips! Please help me, Mrs. Kent, to catch the word. Bend closer:—listen now."

In eagerness to catch the word
Their cheeks touch: Margaret's voice is heard,—
As over her love's passions swell,—

"'I am descending into Hell!'"

Walton, construing her intent,
Knows not she thinks of Robert Kent,
And says,—supposing that her strife
Was to gain pardon for the wife,—

"Well imitated. He has answered, '*No.*'"

Mrs. Townsend has crept far into the room,
And she now makes herself apparent through the gloom:—

"Ah, Margaret! Have you made another *friend?*"

"Oh—I beg your pardon! We—you—I didn't notice it was getting dark. I'll light the gas."

"Kisses are quite enough to light a fireside with."

Margaret, however, lights the gas,
As Walton's hand pours three drops in a glass:—

"There madam, is our apology. We were reviving Uncle from a faint."

"Rather a faint apology!"

"Come Uncle, out into the hall. A breath of fresh air will be good for you."

"Thanks, Alex. I would like to lean on Margaret, if she will permit. My mind needs her support."

Mrs. T—— grasps Walton by the arm.

The others pass.—She takes no art to charm.

"I do not need an introduction, Sir."

"If you don't need one, surely I do not."

And Walton turns himself away,

But she resumes without delay:—

"Allow me to introduce you to your mother, please."

"Mother! Give me her *name* to hang my curses on!"

"Why curse at her?"

"Because she did a thing the meanest beast would never do. She gave me birth, and then deserted me."

"*I* am your mother."

"Damn you, then!"

"And damn your Uncle for deserting me."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I was once your Uncle's wife. That message was from me. I wished to know if he repented yet of his divorce from me. As he does not, I shall proceed to even my account with him. I—*I* am your mother and your Uncle's wife."

"Vile dam! And who am I?"

"Ha! don't you know yourself?"

"I only know what Uncle told me: that one bitter night some beastly woman left me at his door, a sucking babe."

"Did he not know that woman was myself?"

"I think he would have killed you if he did. You say you were his wife! Is he my father, then?"

"No sir, you are a bastard son."

"A bastard! I could kill you and my father for the love which formed my soul."

"Don't speak so loudly. You'll be overheard. Do you desire to know that your true name is 'Robert Olney Kent,' the same one which your Uncle bears? You legally were christened that before I left you at his door. Whatever he has called you since is incorrect, because it 's not your *legal* name. Do you know what the name of 'Robert Kent' implies?'"

"The forfeiture of all I now possess!"

"To gain one-half your Uncle's fortune, and a wife."

"Can your tongue be connected with your brain?"

"My mind is. Listen: as your Uncle has not known my whereabouts, this revelation has been kept until to-day, because the proper time had not arrived."

"And why not until now?"

"I have just ascertained that I am not forgiven by your Uncle for my hot offense to him when I loved someone else, and I shall now begin my schemes to get control of half his fortune, which is willed to Margaret, and to get you a wife, if, as a wife, you can love Margaret Kent."

"What?"

"Her husband's name is Robert Olney Kent, and yours is?"

"Robert Olney Kent!"

"Hence Margaret's marriage paper names you as her legal husband; therefore Margaret is —"

"My wife?"

"By all the laws of man. Do you love her?"

"Love her! love her? I've never met her but this once, yet all my soul is in the passion of a man who kills himself or has what he desires!"

"Then hear me and obey. Conceal this secret of your birth, for you cannot *prove* anything alone. Resume your old name, 'Dr. Walton,' and win the love of Margaret under it until I say the proper time has come—and then, rely on me to prove that Margaret is your wife. Remember me. (*Gives him her card.*) And you, sir, are to be, 'Dr. Walton.'—Go.

Walton starts, but calls back from side hall:

"But is her other husband dead?"

Miss Longstaffe enters as the accents fall—

"Yes, Margaret's Robert Kent is dead (*Walton goes his way, and she goes on to say* —) or soon will be (*is confronted by Miss L——; Mrs. T—— seems entering Hell,*) if Roger Charlton's manner tells the truth!"

Miss Longstaffe slowly repeats—"Then Robert Kent is dead—or soon will be — "

Her home-thrust Mrs. Townsend meets—"'If Roger Charlton's manner tells the truth!'"

But Miss Longstaffe beats no retreats—"If *Mrs. Townsend's* manner tells the truth."

— II —

The scene is shifted to another room,
Where Walton, Margaret and Olney Kent
Are moving through the gloom.

Pale Margaret speaks:—

"And you insist that this repentant woman is not still your wife, though in the eyes of law you are divorced from her? What constitutes a marriage? Verbal laws?"

Walton sees a chance to stake his claim:—

"Observation of the legal forms of marriage—"

But Margaret frustrates his secret aim:—

"In this day it's thought by many that a marriage does consist in observation of the legal forms, while that which truly constitutes the soul of marriage they do not regard as such."

Walton no longer views her as his wife.

The Uncle suddenly shows signs of life:—

"Then listen, Margaret. In time another man stole in upon me and obtained her love, and I considered her divorced from me the moment that she gave it him; and when he ruined her, I held that they were married, though no legal form had been observed. For if the law would recognize such acts, alone, as valid marriages, there would be much less sinning in the world, as it would give the woman *power* to bind the man for life. But now she must bear all the blame and suffering while the man goes free."

Margaret, with good taste, retires

And Walton, wrapped in thought, enquires—

"Is that act what does constitute a marriage, then?"

The old man weighted down with age,

Rises in a petty rage:—

"It is my idea of what the law should recognize as marriage, and bind the parties afterward if they're not bound before. Now men can ruin women and be

thought respectable ; but I think that the law should give that woman power to make that man bear his—the greater—share of all the blame, and it should give the woman power to use, at her discretion, every right a *wife* should have."

Walton's voice assumes a careless languor:—

" Why doesn't our laws protect a woman's rights ? "

And Margaret enters, exclaiming with anger,

" That question brings the Politician's nightmare on ! "

— III —

Into the gloom drifts William Pratt's garret,
Where Pratt is seen ; seeming a man to merit
A better home. His sick child is in bed.

Charlton and Mrs. Townsend enter—he is by her led.

" I tell you, William Pratt, I'm tired of living this apparently unmarried life, and being known as ' Widow Townsend!' You don't exert yourself enough to be acknowledged as my husband, and my dignity and reputation are at stake each time I visit you. That starving child will never be acknowledged as my own, nor will you ever have one cent more from my purse. Look at your starving child ! Now, if you value her life at the price of food, go, pawn that ring, and purchase what she needs. There ! act before you lose the action, sir.—Exactly ! as you always do ! I'll tell you for the last one-hundreth time, when you lack strength to do a thing, accept the strength which comes to you. That impulse, taken, would have made you strong ; but turned away it took its strength with it. Come now, see here !

You promised your first wife never to part with this—her wedding ring. Well now, she's dead. Now well, she's dust. Admitted: your promise is to a clod of dust. All bosh—these foolish sentiments of keeping promises!"

Pratt shows himself to be her better half—

"She is *not* dead, or else religion tells a lie."

She greets his answer with a sneering laugh:—

"Her bones are getting rank, and the loud smell begins to rankle, sir. But what are you to eat? That's right! get down there on your knees and order breakfast; but 'twould be well to eat what meat you can in dreams to-night, then if the 'Providence' to which you pray should fail to fill your orders, to-morrow's breakfast 'bill of fare' may be: Cold Dreams and Mutton Tallow; Mashed Potato Skins. Your dinner could be: Cat-tail Soup. Your supper: Cat's Head, cold. Your—"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Sir William Pratt, that you will have to cook the cat or starve to death. You've eaten everything you have to eat except the cat; you've spent your every cent, and you will never have another one from me; you've not a friend of whom you could intend to borrow and not beg—and you would rather starve than beg. Your sickness and this cursed strike have paralysed the hands which earned you your support; you have refused to pawn your ring, and you have nothing else to pawn: you've lived for two days now without a thing to eat, and on this diet you will surely starve—Toby! come here. I'll gut you now, and let you parboil over night."

"Hold!—but I *cannot* pawn this ring."

"*Can*not *is* not *will* not, sir!"

"I *will* not pawn this ring."

"Strength can be gained upon an empty stomach, sir."

"Yes, my employer's strength was gained upon *my* empty stomach, but he too will suffer for the wrong as well as I. We poor men are awaking to our *rights*, and when our waking dreams are over (*takes a bomb from secret closet*)—we will settle down to cold realities. The cry of every poor man's rights and wrongs shall then be heard. Though it require a bomb-shell for a trumpet, our voices *shall* be heard."

While he replaces bomb in closet,

Mrs. Townsend speaks to Charlton:—

"(I think I've got him desperate enough. Proceed.)"

Charlton from the shades advances:—

"Your name is Pratt, sir, I believe."

Pratt fires at him suspicious glances:—

"The same. And what is yours?"

Charlton sits down in a chair:—

"You will be pleased to know; and therefore 'business before pleasure', sir. I understand that you and Robert Kent are bitter enemies; although I don't know what the trouble is!"

Pratt towers higher in the air:—

"I've sworn to kill him if we ever meet! My life was ruined through false accusations he has made."

"Accusing you of what?"

"Untrue relations with his wife."

"Then they *were* false. This letter states my business with you."

"Your business is mysterious, and I can't see to solve it by this candlelight."

"This is a useful ornament."

"The lamp is empty, lad, and we have no oil in the house."

"Well, surely you have gas!"

"Gas! There is no gas in the house."

"My sense of smell deceives me then. I am acquainted with your wife. *(To Mrs. Townsend.)* Will you take my pocketbook and purchase comforts for that shivering child? I shall expect you back immediately. Go."

Pratt looks a moment at his first wife's ring,
And tighter to it he is seen to cling:—

"One moment. Sir, I wish to ask you while you're in the mood, with my right hand your sole security, will you lend me enough to pay my room rent, which is two months overdue? I am afraid my child and I will be turned out into the street if it is not paid soon."

"I will attend to it before I go away, but in the meantime, I wish you to read that letter, sir."

"Then I must find some place where it is light enough, for this is my last candle, and it even now is sputtering in the stick."

Charlton asks of Mrs. T———,

"He is a man of honor, is he not?"

And she answers sneeringly:—

"Humph! he is a man of *sentiment*."

"Enough! I trust him then. Go, read it where you will."

Pratt exists. Mrs. T——— decides,—

" And I will go and get the comforters."

Behind a chimney in the gloom she hides.

The candle gives one sputter in the stick,

And burns no more; having consumed its wick.

" You poor old starving cat! Is it a pleasure to sit there and mew at me? *(Charlton picks it up.)* Poor thing, you must be starving here. It might be kindness if I killed you now! But it is said that *every* life has some especial use in Providence, and I should feel that it was wrong to take your life unless I knew you *had* been useful. With that knowledge I could kill you conscientiously."

Mrs. T———, with a decided mind,

Steps from the chimney she has hid behind:—

" Sorry to trouble you. I'll not be back again."

" It's no intrusion. Don't apologize."

" Apologize! Intrusion! Well, who thought it such?"

" I thought that you thought that I thought that you thought you were intruding."

" No sir. I merely came to say that I shall never come again to live with William Pratt, and I resign all partnership connecting me with the impending crime of murdering Robert Kent."

" You kindly volunteered assistance, and I thank you for what you have done. I shall proceed to carry out your part myself."

" Miss Longstaffe knows that we are both together in the scheme."

" I told her my intentions: you were not then in my thoughts."

" She found me out herself. But do you still persist in saying you will never marry Margaret when she is free ? "

" A fool could answer that as well as I."

" Remember this : if ever you seek such a thing, I'll let her know who murdered Robert Kent."

" And if you hold your tongue till then she'll never know. *(Mrs. Townsend starting to go out, Charlton quickly wheels himself about.)* You are the first woman I have ever failed to trust ! —Please give me back my purse before you go."

" I think I must have dropped it down below ! "

" If this is an equivalent, I wish to trade it for the purse."

" And what is the equivalent you wish to give ? "

" I'll give a pound of flesh from either arm if you will give me back my pocketbook."

" What nonsense ! "

" I will do it."

" I would like to *see* you do it.—Here's the purse."

" Then you *shall* see me do it. (*lights a match, with*—) Here's the cat."

Mrs. Townsend, in chagrin,
Shows her skull was not too thin:—

" The purse is empty, sir."

Charlton quickly opens it,
While a match spark still is lit:—

" The lining holds ten thousand dollars on a check ! —My God ! what apparition's that ? "

Child advances in night-robe, with—

" Nellie ! Nellie ! ! Nellie ! ! ! "

Falls in Charlton's arms;—he strikes another match.
The light reveals the features of the child,
Who with Death's agony is nearly wild:—

"And is this Death? We men call Death a sleep, and in one moment more I'll close these lids for their eternal slumber, but the soul—O God! —release it—do not let it struggle so! 'Tis gone — poor body, sleep.—Ah, Mrs. Townsend, think of Robert Kent! Well might he envy such a death as this. The child's last earthly vision was her heavenly — ?"

"Sister's!"

"—face. I wish that Kent's last earthly vision could be Margaret's. That she would kneel before him with her face as I have sometimes seen; as though damp chills were freezing in her back, while in her breast burned such dry fever that her heart, between the two, seemed twisted out of joint. At such times would the tender fibres of her face be drawn so tightly that it seemed as though the flesh would crack, and he, the demon who could draw them so, smiled on, unmindful of the harsh contortions which his smiling made. I say, it would be well if his last sight of earth could be this ghastly congregation of its elements—the face of Margaret by his spirit breathed upon; for if he strolled into Eternity from such a sight as this, his soul might soften till he realized he was in Hell. But having been so long there while on earth, if now the earth is merely drawn away, I fear the change will be so slight, he will not notice it."

(Charlton rises, dropping the dead child
Unconsciously. Mrs. Townsend's voice is mild—)

"And is it possible you will not want his wife when he is dead?"

All his vigor seems to die
As he makes the sad reply:—

"As I have always said: when Robert Kent is dead, I shall leave Margaret, and, if possible, evade the law, simply because I do not wish that she should ever know how his death came to him. She must be led to think it was a natural one. Until you told me of the enmity 'tween Pratt and Robert Kent, I thought that *I* would go to South America, but now, if Pratt will go, I think that not one detail of the scheme could be much better planned for gaining Margaret's future happiness, and if Pratt, voluntarily, will fight the duel to which you say Kent once challenged him, I see no reason why *his* difficulty should not settle Margaret's as well."

"But you love Margaret, do you not?"

She notes his voice with melancholy fill:—

"I have not yet decided what constitutes true love of sex for sex."

Young Charlton pauses,—and the world seems still.

* * * * *

Pratt entering like a drunken man,
In darkness on the dead child ran,
But stumbled on,—apparently
Not thinking what the form might be:—

"I have been trying to decide. The more I think of it, the less I think of it."

Charlton offers him a chair:—

"You know the stipulated sum for proof that Robert Kent has died, and if you wish to fight the duel to which he once challenged you, we'll sign these papers, and—it rests with you."

Pratt's wrongs seem more than he can bear:—

"I am a desperate man, and I could do a desperate

thing, but I cannot desert my wife and child, as I should have to do in case I went to South America."

Charlton forces him to sit:—

"I do not wish to seem cold-blooded, yet I am by nature blunt when telling an unpleasant truth. Your wife, sir, has deserted you: your child—"

Pratt jumps as if he had been hit:—

"My wife deserted me! O God be—"

"We have no time for sentiment. Be reconciled as quickly as you can."

"O God be *thanked*. I'm reconciled."

"You've my congratulations. But your child—"

"Don't say it, lad!"

"What?"

"That she has taken her away!"

Again he offers Pratt a chair:—

"No, she has not."

Pratt sinks into it with despair:—

"I'm on this earth only because my child is here, for without her I should not care to live, and *I would suicide if she should die.*"

He rises, starting toward the bed.

Charlton grasps him near the head:—

"Here! here! No time for kisses now. 'Business before—'"

Pratt sits again:—

"I have been very sick, and can earn nothing yet at work. Shall I sit feebly by and day by day see my child starve, when now to do this thing would give her everything she needs for years to come? But if I go away, who will take care of her?"

"I. *(Charlton glances behind him.)* She will not want for anything."

Mrs. T——— is weeping with a vim.

"What noise is that?"

"A storm is coming on. It is the wailing of the wind."

Pratt asks the young solicitor :—

"How will I know that I can trust you, sir?"

And Charlton makes this his reply :—

"By this check for ten thousand dollars, which will be paid to-night, if you agree to furnish satisfactory proof that Robert Kent no longer lives upon this earth. Knowing you had a wife and child, and likely some pet creatures which might require my care, I've put this promise in these papers, thinking it would cover everything :—'To whatever living thing which you now have, I will give everything which love can give till you return.' And so to prove *my* own good faith, I will now pay to you the stipulated sum, and you, to prove *your* own, must leave the child with me until delivery of the proof to one whom I have herein named."

Mrs. Townsend is still wailing
Over her dead child; no failing
In a woman once a mother,
Can all love for her child smother.

"For my child's sake, I'll do it, sir."

"Then as 'tis herein written, if I pay ten thousand dollars, you relinquish every claim on every living thing which you now have, and give me sole possession from this hour until you have delivered to a party herein named the satisfactory proof that Robert Kent no longer lives upon this earth : Understanding, that for the proof which you deliver, I will return whatever this agreement places in my care, which in

the meantime will receive more than your love could give if you remained at home. Is it a bargain?"

Still that piteous wail is heard;
Making hollow Pratt's stern word,—

"For my child's sake, I'll do it, sir."

"Then go and get a light, that we may sign these papers now. *(Charlton, stumbling 'gainst the child, turns with every action wild.)* No, never mind, I've two wax matches here."

"You can't write much by just two matches, sir."

"We need write nothing but our names. Already everything is written in the terms which we have made. *(lights a match.)* This paper is in duplicate. Please read it while the first match burns."

He glances at the dead child's form,
And motions to a calm the storm.
Pratt reads:— His sight begins to blur:—

"For my child's sake I'll do it, sir."

And with a flash the match goes out,
The instant Pratt has turned about.

"Here is a fountain pen. Please sign your name while this, the last match, burns.—Where are you going, sir?"

"I have not strength to sign it till I see her pleading face!"

"No time for sentiment. No light for seeing faces now. Sit down and take the pen before I light this match, which is the last—the only one I have."

Lights it.—Pratt signs, and tries to start
Toward the bed.—Charlton's hands part:—

"One moment, sir! I said you would be pleased to know my name."

And Charlton signs his signature.

"What! Roger Charlton! my employer's son?"

"The same."

"I am *not* pleased to know you, lad."

"If you betray me now, this paper shows you a co-partner in the plot."

"That need not have been said. I am no traitor, sir."

"The steamer sails for South America at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon. By that time you must cash this check, take out what money you will need, deposit the remainder as you wish, purchase your passage and what clothes you want, and take the boat for South America. Enclosed in this you'll find instructions for locating Robert Kent. Now—string your wits on threads of wisdom, and—begone."

"Where?"

"'Most anywhere, 's long 's you take the boat to-morrow afternoon."

"What! Would you turn me out of my own home?"

"This home is not your own. My father, your employer, was the owner of these flats. He has just died and left the property to me. You are two months behind, sir, in your rent, and I must ask you to vacate at once."

"Why turn me out into the storm for just one night?"

"Ten thousand dollars ought to warm you just one night."

"This check, sir, is not worth one cent to me until it's cashed."

"Why, my dear friend, I hadn't thought of that!—Here take—Oh, I forgot! My purse is empty. Phew! what shall I do?"

"Let me stay here to-night and I won't need a cent."

"One moment! O God—(*Extends his arms toward Mrs. T——, whom, in the dark, Pratt fails to see.*—) Five dollars!—Thank you. Take it. Go."

"What! does God hire you to do this crime?"

"I settle the account with Him."

"—But why are you so anxious I should leave this room to-night?

"I've just assumed my father's business, and I'm resolved to run the thing on strictly business principles. This is the first day of another month, your rent remains unpaid, and you must go. I never break a rule in business."

"Then I will bid my child a long good-bye, and go."

"Please go without. She must not be disturbed."

"And why not wake her, lad?"

"Would you recall her to this earth and all its sufferings, when now she seems so peaceful in her sleep?"

Pratt calms himself, and meekly makes reply:—

"I know the agony of her pains, and when awake she suffers terribly. I'll kiss her only once, and then I'll go."

But Charlton stands, and will not let him by:—

"Is your parental love a sensual one?"

"It will be done so softly that—"

"You must *not* kiss that child!"

"*I* must not kiss *my* child! What right have you to tell me that?"

"The right that you have given in this paper. Sir, it reads, that you relinquish every claim, and give me sole possession from this hour—"

"This hour has not yet ended!"

"Hark!—the clock is striking, sir."

Pratt leaves, without another word,
And from the darkness Charlton's voice is heard:—

" Now Mrs. Townsend, I can almost call the murder done, but it has seemed as though the heavens were against my scheme. A man must feel himself almost a God, before he takes a human life into his hand and moulds its destiny to suit his own designs. Yet so have I now done with Robert Kent. I've placed myself before my God : have deemed my judgment equal to His own, and have despatched the soul of Kent to Hell before its Maker's proper summons came. It must not be. O Pratt, come ———. *No.* I will not let the frenzy of a moment undermine the calm deliberation of a month. I'll play between Creator and created : the human tool of Divine Providence. Through Gladys' letter I'll give God a chance to thwart my scheme. But I have firmly put my hand upon the plough, and there will be *no* vacillation now."

Again Pratt staggers through the door.

" What are you back for ? "

And Charlton drags the child across the floor:—

" Anything forgotten, Pratt ? "

" No, — nothing. But a thought passed over me which made me sicken till I staggered to the ground. Perhaps it was a foolish thought—but, lad, upon your honor, — yes or no, is my child dead ? "

Charlton meets him with uplifted head
And shoulders back:—

" No sir, she is not dead."

Pratt exits.

Charlton's nervous strain is past. His muscles slack:—

" Have I, or has Religion told a lie ? "

ACT II

Time brings before our eyes a different scene.
Rio Janeiro lies, with glittering sheen,
Far in the night's background: One house is near.
A man and woman presently appear:—

"Florence, I have decided we must leave Rio Janeiro, and I'm so grieved about two things, that I can't tell for which I grieve the most. I'm sorry I can't pay the mortgage interest on our home, and that the whole affair will have to be foreclosed; and yet this weighs but lightly on my mind when I think you are called upon to bear the crushing disappointment too. Of course, the heaviest must naturally fall on me, but as just said, I have the added weight of thinking you are groaning 'neath the burden just as much as I, who suffer terribly, but please don't let my suffering make you suffer, dear; for mine is mainly caused by thinking of your suffering for me. So, dearest heart, be happy in the happiness of thinking I am happy by your happiness. Now leave me with my thoughts, for when my eye of sense is blinded by the night, I can see clearer mentally, and may discover some way out of our entanglement.—Are you not going, dear?—Please do not cling to me like this! I wish to be alone.—Good-night, my darling!—Now, dear, this kiss must be our last.—Please, Florence, I wish you would leave!—I must use force if you refuse

to go.—See now what you have done! you've wrung your hand in mine so much that you have worked your wedding ring from off your finger, and it's fallen on the ground.—No, no, don't poke around for it there in the sand. You'll only bury it. Just step aside and wait till daylight comes. Now you *must* leave. Again, Good-night!"

The woman leaves, and he calls after her,—

"I will be with you, dear, in half an hour, *at least*."

And then he adds,—

"I said 'in half an hour *at least*'; now I will add 'but never at *the most*.' Show me a woman whom I cannot dupe!"

A woman enters at the closing word:—

"I'll show you one!"

He starts, and turns to see what he has heard:

"Well, woman, you are punctual! Now prove that you are not insane to make in writing an appointment at this time of night in such a place as this."

"Sir, I wish you to know that I am Mrs. Townsend of New York."

"Ah ha! — then you are not insane."

"That follows."

"Certainly: because you never yet were what you seemed to be."

"What seems my reason for now being here?"

"That Margaret sent you as a spy."

"You will not be deceived in that."

"I'm not so sure of it."

"You will believe me, though."

"Not while I can surmise."

" Belief in me will be your ' saving faith.' "
" Believing in the devil saves no man."
" Believe my words : There rise the gallows, sir."

She points into an open well near by.
He staggers back, making the quick reply:—

" To know of it you must have seen it done ! "

She comes up to him with extended hand:—

" One-half the plunder will forever seal my lips."

He sums what dignity he can command:—

" I don't believe your promise would be kept."

With which she snaps her fingers in his face:—

" Then you will lose your life through unbelief."

And he replies as he retires a pace:—

" No madam, I do not believe I will."

She has but one condition in her threat:—

" Unless you have a ' saving faith ' in me."

But he will not accept salvation yet:—

" I'll think it over ; in the meantime, you keep cool. I'm going back to Margaret, if I can get the where-with-all to take me there with all my strategems. Here's the result of my last one—conceived while it was executed. Poor Florence ! It's our wedding ring.—How odd that sounds! Why, it should be 'our wedding *rings.' (Takes off his own.)* ' Our wedding rings ! ' *(Jingles them.)* That does sound better ! These two will sell for old gold now, and buy some trinket to present to Margaret. Yet Gladys was the one who sent the invitation to come home. I wonder if I must present it at the door 'fore Margaret will let me in ! And by the way ! It might look better if I had *our* wedding ring upon my finger when I knocked. I've worn it on my middle toe. I'm superstitious about

wedding rings! *(takes off his shoe.)* I wonder if she loves me yet! Oh well, no use in speculating over that. She'll have a chance to prove it if she does.—Here is the ring upon the other toe that Margaret gave when Gladys came. The wedding ring was on my finger when she put this after it and said—'Robert, let this one *guard* your wedding ring.' Come! come! no more of this! I'll get my shoe and stocking on, and then,—No madam, I cannot believe in you."

Again she makes her proposition full:—

"Give me one-half the spoils which you have hidden in this well and I will not reveal your crime to anyone. If you refuse, I'll see that you are hung till dead."

He lights a lantern:—gives his nose a pull:—

"A court trial's better than a lynching mob!"

She mocks the sanctimonious priest:—

"'Believe, and you are saved.'"

"'Forgive, and I do believe!'"

The imitated prodigal then ceased
To be upon the earth—descending in it.
She, like the priest, has inspired in a minute,
An ignorant belief 'gainst what is known:—

"Salvation will not come by faith alone."

Unlike the priest, she speaks out her true thought,
Regarding the belief which has been taught.
A man steps slowly from behind a tree,
And Mrs. Townsend beckons,— "Come to me."

"Tell me, Sir William Pratt, having now run a skunk into a well, how can I kill him best?"

Pratt slowly turns around—she hears him say—

"By burying him." — *and moves without delay,*

Up to a stone which poises on the brink,
And ere slow Pratt again has time to think,
Rolls it into the well. They both peer down,
And she takes hold of Pratt's head by the crown:—

" See him there in the mud ! The stone's on top of him. There's not a sound arising.—Robert Kent is dead."

But mad Pratt, peering down the well,
Seems gazing at the sights of Hell:—

" Look ! look ! his spirit's coming up ! "

" It's but the flickering of his lantern on the wall."

" Do you see any blood upon my hands ? "

" Your mind is wandering ! "

Pratt claps his hand across his eyes,
And with an effort starts to rise:—

" Had you not led me to believe that this man was his uncle, after whom it now appears this man was merely named, I never would have pledged myself to do this sickening crime. You well know how the other Robert Kent, excited by your always lying tongue, accused me falsely of your ruin and disgrace. That accusation, in which he persisted with a stubbornness which fed upon your lies, has wrecked my entire life, and had this Robert Kent been him, as till the other night you led me to believe, I would have fought the challenged duel with no conscientious pangs—but when I learned that this was not that Robert Kent, I couldn't take his life and drink his blood."

Mrs. Townsend goes to him:—

" Then as I've done it, give me my reward."

Pratt asks again, with added vim:—

" Do you see any blood upon my hands ? "

Her mind is bent on but one thing:—
" Will you give me my reward for killing him ? "
Not yet has reason taken wing:—
" When you have given proof that he is dead."
" His name is tattooed on his hand."
" The proof is handy, then."
" And will the hand be proof enough ? "
She asks, preparing to descend.
Toward Heaven Pratt's lean arms extend:—
" His hand and *head*—Ya-a-a-a-a—Kill me ! I am going mad."
Mrs. T——— at once comes back:—
" I'll kill you if you'll give me my reward."
She slaps his face a sounding whack:—
" Come, *are* you going mad ? The love for which you plunged into this crime should help you out of it."
The breezes of each blow upon him seem
To fan his sickly Reason's flickering gleam:—
" 'For my child's sake, I'll kill him, sir.' Oh, love did oil those words so well, that when I tried to say, 'this crime is wrong,' I said ''tis right,' for I felt something would be righted by the wrong, yet knew that it was wrong to make it right."
" Come, stop your idiotic talk ! "
" Had calm deliberation held my hand, until tired Reason muttered 'let it go —' "
" Impulsive strength would be unknown to you."
" I've found it but a mental squall of wind."
" But it has fanned your sickly nature into life."
Impulsive strength becomes her as a wife;
Again she fans his nature into life,
Sounding as if she his face had kissed;—
But when again she slaps, the face is missed.
Pratt answers, with his actions far less wild:—

"If only I can once more have my child, we'll both die honored by that nature's honest death, before we thrive on Kent's dishonest blood."

Mrs. Townsend grasps him by the beard:—

"Then I should have the money Charlton gave. Sir William Pratt, your child was dead when that contract was signed."

Stern Pratt does not believe—'twas what she feared:—

"My child was dead when that contract was signed! You lie. The proof! the proof will get me back my child. I'll give you all the money when you give the proof."

She knowing well his stubbornness,
Knows that he knows she is truthless,
And down the well starts to descend.
Pratt shows on what his doubts depend:—

"I asked Charlton if she was dead, he answered, '*No.*'"

To which the woman adds—descending:—

"And asked if he, or Christ's religion, told a lie."

This puts all Pratt's doubts at an ending.
Weakly sinking to the ground,
He gazes vacantly around:—

"There is no power in Heaven or Hell but love, and I must love myself enough to be avenged, or die where I now am. It is a power from Hell, but it *must* strengthen. (*rises*) No! it's but an impulse and a madness. I'll not trust to it. (*sinks—rises.*) But I have promised Roger Charlton that my part of this contract would be fulfilled, and I will never break a promise I have made. Sure, honor is a love of self which Heaven must permit."

Florence enters, seeking for the man
She left behind. Pratt madly tries to scan
Her face; and in the pale moonlight,
Shows that, at last, Reason has taken flight:—

"Pray who are you, my lovely maid?"

"I am the *wife* of Robert Kent."

"Will you be mine when he is dead?"

"I am, *till* death his wife."

"Well said! *My* wife—once Mrs. Kent—said it, not knowing what it meant. A *friend* heard her pretty name, though she was a handsome dame—loved and plunged her into shame. Does my love for you seem tame? It's because I fear the same.—Well, suppose your husband came? Would apologies be lame?—Come and kiss me, lovely dame."

Florence runs away from him,
While from the Well's ragged rim,
Seeming from another world,
Come the words, from its depths hurled:—

"Pull up the bucket hanging down the well."

Mad Pratt absently obeys,
While his thoughts his actions craze:—

"The woman says she is his wife. It is a fancy!—Why is she his wife? Because she has a passion for the man. I'll make her have a passion now for me: and then she will be my wife if she takes a fancy to the thought; and we'll be married—married—why, what does that mean? Come back, my head, and sit here on my shoulders while I think!—What, this is not my head.—It is the head of Robert Kent!—That lovely women *has* remained until his death, the wife of Robert Kent. My wife intended to, but she

did not. No, *she* did not remain his wife, but let us see what power it was that bound the other wife of Robert Kent to him till death."

Pratt follows Florence, with the head and hand;
The moon is blackened—darkness fills the land.

— II —

The night scene shifts to Uncle Olney's farm,
After an evening party; when the charm
Of Japanese lanterns has nearly gone,
And left only the moonlight on the lawn.
Margaret and Dr. Walton enter:—

"Are we alone at last?"

He sweetly tries to take her hand;
But she refuses his demand:

"Were we alone at first?"

"When we were bending over Uncle in your parlor, do you mean? When Miss Longstaffe was in a room adjoining by an open door? When Mrs. Townsend was behind us in the room which we were in? And when your Uncle, absent through unconsciousness, at any instant might revive and be with us?—Well I suppose that we are now no more alone. Yet then we were in social solitude."

"How could that be?"

"You were alone in wishing to revive my Uncle. I was alone in wishing, for a moment, he would not revive. Yet neither of us were alone; for bending toward his lips in eagerness to catch that word, our hot cheeks touched, and we each felt the other one was there. Do not deny it; for I felt the warm blood flush into

your cheek. My own head swam, but yours seemed trained for such emergencies. And let me now congratulate you on that little strategem—the tone of voice in which you wailed those words, 'I am descending into Hell!' 'Twas such a perfect imitation of the way his wife perhaps wailed them, that they recalled his absent spirit far more quickly than I could have done with stimulants. The bare idea of imitating her showed brilliancy—perhaps your wit inspires my tongue too much?"

"Your silence *seemed* to best inspire my wit."

"If you persist in being witty I *must* talk. Your wit inspires."

"Your speech made my thought warm, but chilled my wit."

"Then you shall think until your wit perspires. I'll make a warmer speech to you. 'Tis that—

One hope above all effort soars,
One dream comes o'er me when I rest,
And in my mind a rapture pours
Which cannot be expressed
Till you feel raptured at the word
Which gives this hope, this dream, to life:
Until, my darling, you have heard
That I have hoped to call you—'Wife.'

"Why, those are Roger Charlton's rhymes!"

Her dart strikes Walton through the head:—

"They were anonymously published in a petty magazine (*one which he thought she had not read*) and Fancy strung them on my tongue.—But who is Roger Charlton, pray?"

"A friend."

"Did Roger Charlton write these rhymes to you?"

"Yes, with another verse. Will you repeat it, please?"
"*Must* I?"

Margaret hesitates:—
"I—I think it best!"

Walton for a moment waits:—
"'Still disappointed hopes *will* twine
Around you, where life's dream is wrapped,
Though that one thought—'you'll not be mine'—
Has all their vigor sapped.
But I will no more pain your breast
With torturing love against it pressed:
My future life from yours I'll wrest,
Yet love you always. It — it —'"

He will not *finish,*
She concludes:—
"—— seems best."

Walton, true to his own part,
Knows she speaks not from her heart:—
"Will you allow me, Mrs. Kent, to call you 'Marguerite?'"

Miss Longstaffe enters with a large bouquet:—
"Dr. Walton, do you like flowers?"

He still continues to look Margaret's way:
"Yes, I like Marguerites."
"How strange!"
"I like a singular — of the plural."
"What?"
"I like a single Marguerite."
"A *single* one?"
"I would not like a married one."
"How foolishly you talk!"
"You have a Marguerite?"
"Yes, I have one at your disposal."

And Miss Longstaffe extends a single flower:
He looks at the bouquet with passionate power:—

"Would you object if I should choose my own?"
"Not in the least."
"Then I would choose *this* Marguerite for mine."

He turns and looks at Margaret,
Whose blushes show her passion yet.

"I've never seen such boldness shown to Margaret Kent!"

And Miss Longstaffe could not forget.
Walton speaks with downcast eyes:—

"I humbly beg your pardon. Mrs. Kent, have I become too bold?"

And Margaret painfully replies:—

"No — but—don't say any more to me."
"Then, Miss Longstaffe, as she forbids my talking any more to her, I'll have to go away forever if I hold my tongue."

And Walton seemingly prepares to go;
But Margaret's answer is not calm nor slow:—

"Don't go away from me!"

Thinking it will exaggerate
Her love, he tries to leave in haste:—

"She has forbidden me to speak to her!"

She scorns him for such stubbornness:—

"How cruel not recognize my countermand. Speak just one sentence, sir, then go away."

But Walton sees she cares for him no less:—

"Margaret, I will write to you."

He leaves, and Miss Longstaffe remarks:—

"That man well knows the art of *making* love.—Have you forgotten that your husband is alive?"

Margaret bows her head; the silence harks:—

"I have resolved to be divorced from Robert Kent."

ACT III

The wheel of Time another month has spun;
Young Charlton up to Pratt's garret has run.
He lights a lamp, unseals a letter, and begins to read:—

"'Our true love bond is broken
If the truth to me is spoken :
'Tis that you, misunderstanding
The power which is commanding
The love you give to me,
Are in your thoughts aspiring
A hidden end : desiring
To give me your love beyond
Restrictions of my present bond
With Robert Kent. ——'

Well, Margaret, I am aspiring *this* hidden end: desiring *your true happiness* beyond restrictions of your present bond with Robert Kent."

He fires the letter with a match,
Watching it burn ; then seems to catch
Determination from the thought,
And to his feet at once is brought:—

"Desire for your true happiness forms my true love for you, and in what constitutes it, *passion* will not have one thing to do."

A moment's silence: Enter Pratt,
Treading on Toby, the cat.

"Well, well, my friend ; I got your telegram saying you would return from South America to-day and meet me here to-night. You've kept your word."

"I always keep my word when it is in my power. I've never broken but one promise in my life."

"And what was that?"

"I promised myself I should see my daughter here with you."

Charlton takes a paper from his pocket:—

"In this agreement it is written that you give me sole possession till delivery of the proof that Robert Kent has died."

Pratt sputters at him like a rocket:—

"And when that proof has been delivered will you give me back —"

"You have my written pledge to give as I agreed."

"Alive or dead?"

"Alive, as we agreed in this contract."

"I don't believe you, lad."

"Produce the proof that *you* have done as *you* agreed and I will carry out *my* part as *I* agreed."

"I am convinced my child is not alive."

"I never in my life have told a lie."

"Give me my daughter first."

"Let your proof prove me false or true to my agreement, sir. We'll carry out the thing exactly as 'tis written here."

"And in case you have lied to me?"

Charlton hands to him a roll of bills:—

"Examine them."

Pratt in a moment with renewed hope thrills:—

"Ten thousand dollars!"

"If I have lied to you, it will be yours."

Pratt now believes that his child is alive:—

"I will lay by the forfeit and produce the proof."

A hollow glass, shaped like a small bee-hive,
He lifts out of a box as Charlton turns:—
Within him horrid anger at Pratt burns:—

"Do you attempt to craze me with a sight like this, and then deceive me with the thought: 'It is the head of Robert Kent?' — Yet it resembles every portrait I have seen."

"Here is more proof for you."

"A ring! Well, what of that?"

"Please look at the inscription, lad."

"'Robert — Margaret — December 20, 1876.' The fatal day that they were married! Yes."

"Another ring which goes with that!"

"'Gladys — October—77.' Yes."

"Do you want more proof?"

"Yes."

Pratt gives to him the severed hand:—

"Read the tattooed inscription, sir."

Charlton's gaze on it is bent,
And he mutters, "Robert Kent,"
But seems not to understand.
Slowly turning to Kent's head,
In a strange, weird voice is said:—

"I'm much more pleased with this sight over here. It's much more horrible, but far more satisfactorily it shows an *end* of Robert Kent. *(Charlton acts quite foolishly.)* Did you bring up the other one?"

"He only had one head. What do you want?"

"The other end of Kent. I want his foot. Laugh! was not that a good pun, sir?"

"How can you be so heartless with your subject, lad?"

"So heartless with my subject? Kent *is* a heartless subject, is he not? Come, laugh! That was another

pun. Tell me : where is the heart of Robert Kent ?"

"I left it with his wife. She was a lovely woman ! She *would* be, till death, his wife. 'Will you be mine when he is dead ?'—I asked her ; and she said—"

"What are you telling me, you fiend ! That you have left the heart of that man with his wife ? Sir, when came you to know the wife of Robert Kent ?"

"When he accused me falsely of her ruin and disgrace, and then held we were married, though no legal form had been observed : and as the man persisted in that accusation with a stubbornness which fed upon her lies, from a consideration for the woman, whom he then deserted, I consented to become her husband, but, me lad, she proved that when a marriage partner ceases to regard the sacredness of marriage once, that partner's moral character is not improved by marrying a second time."

"Sir, you are raving mad, and yet you have more wisdom than the bigwigs of our law, who, although Robert Kent's first marriage was a wreck, would still allow its guilty partner every right to wreck a second one."

"Why need her first marriage have ended so ?"

"Simply because of incapacity for a desire above a passionate love, which is the alcohol of a fermenting blood that kills the heart, although it stimulates the head and hand."

"Ay ! Ay ! it *was* that love which made her heartless, but she had a head and hand which few could grapple with."

"Sir William Pratt, present that sight to Margaret Kent, that she may hold it to the world's eye as an illustration of the ruinous work of passionate love."

"— The heart decayed, although the head and hand appear to be unchanged."

* * * * * *

Pratt wonders where his child can be:—

"But you amended your agreement; keep it so. It's herein written I should give the proof to Margaret Kent, but you said if I would deliver it to you, you'd give me back — you are not listening lad!"

"Were you remarking something, Mr. Pratt?"

Sternly Pratt continues now,
While a doubt darkens his brow:—

"I have just given, *dead*, the life you left with me. Please give me now, *alive*, the life I left with you."

Charlton bows politely to the floor:—

"This is the only one you left, sir. Here's the cat."

Poor Pratt can hold in now no more:—

"You liar, you *have* lied to me!"

Cool Charlton holds out their contract:—

"Do you know how this reads?"

But Pratt's mind seems completely racked:—

"I don't know anything."

With self-possession Charlton reads:—

"My charge was, 'every *living* thing' you had. When this contract was signed, your child was *dead*."

Pratt couches like a tiger at his feet:—

"Have you, or has Religion, told a lie?"

Charlton stands—then slowly beats retreat:—

"— It's my belief Religion tells the truth.—I have been fairly beaten.—Take the forfeit, sir. The murder of this man and your wrongs torture my poor soul. Only my love for Margaret can make it bearable.—But Margaret, your happiness shall be my first desire, for merely amorous affection cannot constitute true

love. When I have proved your happiness to be my first desire, this crime will be an noble one."

Pratt's head has sunk upon his knees:—

"Nothing is noble when ignobly done!"

His words Charlton's blood seem to freeze:—

"Then crime cannot be nobly done."

He lays his hand upon Kent's head,
And takes Kent's hand into his own:—

"Our marriage, Margaret, can never be; but I thank *Hell* that you from Robert Kent are free."

A past life lies before him,—dead,
The future of the past,—unknown.

* * * * *

From the closet Pratt removes the bomb,
Lights the fuse—then stands a moment dumb:—

"'Tis written here, 'I will deliver the said proof to *Margaret Kent*.' With not a promise broken in my life, shall I now break this one in death?—*No!* (*He extinguishes the fuse.*) I will subjugate my death to what my life has been—a slave to that one sentiment of keeping promises. (*Discovers Charlton in a faint.*) Poor Margaret, I pity you, but I must to myself be true, and I've two duties to perform before I die; one to that fellow-man, the other to my God. My duty to that fellow-man demands this promise be fulfilled: the duty to my God.—'Thy will'—judgment on Roger Charlton's head—'be done on *earth*': And that Thy judgment may be passed on earth, poor Margaret must read his signature on this—'The Doom of Robert Kent.'"

He puts Charlton's agreement with his own,
And lays them in the hand of Robert Kent;
Returns the head and hand into the box,
And puts his bomb into a leather bag:—

" *This* bomb for Margaret : *this* bomb for me."
And Pratt goes out, taking the box and bag.

— II —

Again the esthetic home of Margaret Kent.
But Margaret, herself, this time is bent
With easy grace above a manuscript.
Her emptied pen into the ink is dipped,
When George, a servant, enters with a card.
" What, George ! a caller at this time of night ? "
" Yes ma'am ; he says that he must see you, please."
" Why don't you bring the card to me ? "
" Because I find you're in your ' sanctuary.' "
" ' Sanctum ! ' can't you remember it ? "
" No ma'am, I can't. I get the two words mixed sometimes. The dictionary said a ' sanctum ' was a holy place where angels stayed, and so I never feel I'm good enough to come in here."
" You're good enough to be wherever I am, George."
" I never thought of it ! You are the kind of angels that stay in sanctums, then."
Goes up to Margaret and gives the card.
She reads the name — her features become hard:—
" Why, what's the matter, Mrs. Kent ? "
" Oh — nothing, — let the gentleman — come up."
George leaves and Margaret calls after him:—
" But he must wait a minute. I can't meet him in such plight as this."
Lets down her hair before the glass.—
George, hearing not her call, brings Walton in,
But feeling his mistake to be a sin
Unfitting him to stay where Margaret is,
With bowed head, meekly vanishes.

"Margaret!"

"Please call me, Mrs. Kent. Good evening, Dr. Walton, I hope you will excuse this great disorder and untidiness. I had to have some writing ready by to-morrow for the printer, and have been working desperately at it. Being so late, I had not thought it probable that callers would come in. This is the copy of a poem which the editor had paid me for, and I had spent the money, and my conscience twitted me. and I resolved to finish it. I've ruined my gold pen in the attempt."

"I fear you ruined your pen writing me."

"I fear that letter which I sent was ruinous to the brilliant estimation you expressed."

"Indeed, it did not ruin my own estimation of you, Mrs. Kent, but for a future brilliant estimation in the eyes of all the world, I think,—I hope—I half believe that it has ruined you.—I mean, that on the strength of what your pen has written me, I feel the right to ruin it and say 'You shall not write for money anymore; henceforth I shall take care of you.' Please tell me: has not money made your pen go round to-night?"

The rising passion Margaret tries to hide:—

"I see; you do not know what a brilliant authoress I am. I have a Destiny."

But Walton's passion is at its flood-tide:—

"Your Destiny is to belong to me. Have you not made it so? Do you not wish it so? I love you! Simply love you, dearest, with the truest love on earth.—Oh, why are you so silent? — Is it because you care for some one else—speak—more than me?"

She turns to Walton with uplifted face:—

"No—no—there is no one!"

She yields to his embrace,—then shows surprise.

And he, having her wedding ring, replies:—

"You think I should have waited! is that it?—But why should I have waited? Are you not now mine? Then in all justice you ought not to bind yourself to me still linked by this ring to another man. If you now love me more than your dead husband, I have every right to break your former chain."

"What sir! is my husband dead?"

"Is he alive?"

"I thought you knew it, sir."

"Why Mrs. Townsend told me he was dead! Knew it! I knew it? What do you think of me?"

"I thought you knew. How could you help but know, when everybody does? He is in South America."

"— And is this so! Then, simply to vindicate my conduct, let me state the fact that I supposed you were a widow.—I beg you to enlighten my dull understanding as to the nature of your caprice with my love. What role was I to fill in your life, please? Must I read this? It is from Uncle!"

Walton glances at the letter,

Every nerve would break its fetter:—

"Oh, I see! You are *going* to have a divorce! A most magnanimous intention. Personally I must express my gratitude."

Margaret, stung by each expression,

Struggles for calm self-possession:—

"I never thought, sir, of deceiving you! What have I done to gain or keep your love? Did you not come here of your own free will? And when your Uncle,

whom I loved and trusted so entirely, wrote me in that way, I felt my safety and my happiness to lie in following his advice.—It seemed to have been settled for me, and I was so tired of struggling all alone.—I cannot understand it all! Your uncle says there in his letter that you wrote to him about your love for me, and I thought you had wisely settled it between you; and so when you came to-night,—what else could I expect?"

Walton's thoughts, on passion's tide
Have been drifting far and wide:—

"I understand it all. I have not yet seen Uncle Rob since I returned, and he did not have time to write before I came. He never dreamed I cared for you until I wrote.—But he speaks here of some young man, whose love should give you strength for a divorce."

"Do you mean Roger Charlton?"

"Yes. Is Charlton anything to you?"

"What did I tell you once?"

"Tell me again. Is there a man,—leaving the one in South America alone,—who now stands nearer to your heart than I?"

"Dr. Walton!"

"Tell me."

"Your ignorance insults me, sir."

"My love is no less true!"

"Your ignorance still insults, if you believe our love can be. It is all ended: quite."

"My love is true: the end can never be."

"And do you think this passionate affection constitutes true love?"

" When given only to one woman ; yes."
Maryaret like a goddess stands—
As one bound not with Earth's bands:—
" Then you are with the world. Go, sir, where you belong. I am above such love."

— III —

On the ill-lit street in front,
Enters Pratt,—with accents blunt:—
" This bomb for Margaret ; this bomb for me ! "
He ascends the steps. The door
Walton opens:—Pratt says o'er:—
" This bomb for Margaret ; this bomb — "
From Walton's lips the words are flung:—
" You drunken bum ! Clear out of here ! "
Pratt asks, with every nerve unstrung:—
" Is — is — M — Margaret to home ? "
Walton thinks, " Whom can this be,
Who speaks a word denied to me ? "
" Who are you ? Where do you come from, sir ? "
" I come from — from South America.—Is M – M – Margaret to home ? "
" From South America ! " —the thoughts quickly occur ;
" He calls her 'Margaret;' " " Kent has come back to her ! "
" (This must be Robert Kent !) "
" Is M – M – Margaret to home ? "
" She is."
Pratt, staggering, passes on and in,
While Dr. Walton murmurs with a grin:—
" And she shall teach me what does constitute true love ! "
He listens for a moment: from within
Comes a cry to make the cheeks grow thin,

For Margaret's words the wildest horrors tell:—
" I am descending into Hell ! "
Pratt, in a second, rushes through the door:—
" Stand back ! Stand back ! I am a desperate man ! "
He lights the fuse of bomb:— Walton stands o'er:—
" Margaret shall teach me what *does* constitute true love.
You shall not kill yourself ! "
With which he snatches bomb: both grapple in
The darkness: bomb explodes—and with the din
A window curtain flies up like a shot,
Revealing Miss Longstaffe with anger hot,
Extending Robert's hand to Margaret,
In which " The Doom of Robert Kent " lies yet:
Miss Longstaffe points at Charlton's signature:
The light from window faintly shows the poor,
Torn, wrecked, and lifeless form of honest Pratt,
And Walton, stealing off without his hat:—
While dead, beneath the window, lies Toby, the cat.

— IV —

The scene is changed as by a magic spell.
Rio Janeiro has a prison-cell,
In which a man is lying on a bed.
A woman rises:—he hurls at her head:—
" None but the devil comes here in this shape ! "
" Sh – h – h – ! not so loud ! I'm Mrs. Townsend, sir."
" Yes, madam, that is what I said."
Mrs. Townsend whispers in his ear:—
" I have come here to help you to escape. Come, follow me."
And he replies, in tones which mock her fear:—
" ' Get thee behind me, Satan ! ' "
She motions to a hole through which she came:—
" Give me your hand and I will save your life."

But he replies in tones he cannot tame:—

"That's what you said when we were in the *well*. I cut my hand off and I gave it you——"

"And thereby saved your life."

"I lost my freedom, which was just as dear."

"You lost that for your brother's death."

"*You* killed my brother, though."

"When I cut off his head?"

"Yes; for when I slung him in the well, the Court has proved he was not dead."

"Well then, I saved your life by losing his."

"My freedom, as I said, was life when lost."

"Then I will save your freedom, sir."

"You'll save my freedom by losing my life!"

"I'm not deceiving you."

"Not in the least. You came to-night to kill me while I slept. I heard you digging through the wall into my cell. Behold, it is a trap: you are the mouse: I am the bait: you've nibbled at me—"

"But it hasn't snapped!"

"The trap is of a different kind."

"*Hell*!"

"You are in it: get out if you can."

ACT IV

Margaret now lives in a Country Home,
Into a room of which she has just come,
Where Miss Longstaffe is taking stitches
In a manly pair of breeches,
Which, ill-fitting such a dame,
Margaret sits down to exclaim:—

"The horror of my life! To think that I, — I, Margaret Kent, who have had such visions and such dreams, have come to this!"

Miss Longstaffe slowly lays aside her work:—

"Margaret, is it Divine Economy to lose one life to gain another one?"

Margaret shows that both the question shirk:—

"I wish you would decide for me. I'm losing everything for Robert Kent. Since he came home I have lost faith, hope, love and even self-respect, in order that he may live happily. (*Gladys enters, but by neither seen.*) Ambition lost, nothing is anything to me. How can I live when life from me has gone, and left me in my body all alone?"

Gladys steps from out behind the screen:—

"Your life is in me, mamma! I am here."

"Yes dear, you are my life to me."

Miss Longstaffe rises, taking Margaret's hand:—

"And I?"

" You are the salt of it."

And she concludes, continuing to stand:—

" Believe one thing ; that where you are, there I am also, Margaret. If thirsting in the desert, I too thirst with you : if where the waters bubble up, I too will bubble up."

Margaret gives a little laugh:—

" I like to have you bubble up ! — There, I feel better now, but do not like to have my patience in suspense."

Then comes this ponderous speech from Miss Longstaffe:—

" Margaret, I have at last decided an undecidedness in all my past decisions. I wish to talk with you. This life need not go on."

She beckons Margaret and they leave the room.

Gladys speaks as though within a tomb:—

" Mamma, I know papa has asked you for more money, but he shall not do it anymore. I'll give him all of mine. You wouldn't take it, but perhaps he will. I *must* help some."

(*She gets her bank and screw-driver.*) " I've ever so many gold pieces. *Real* gold! Mamma said that they were. And one's a great big one. I'll count them over for the last time now, and I'll remember all the happiness which came with every one. (*Her father comes in at the rear.*) Here is the big one Uncle Olney gave me when I wouldn't marry Roger Charlton at my birthday-party 'cause I loved mamma too much to love him most. This was my wedding present when I didn't marry him. Good-bye now for the first last time ! (*She kisses it.*) Good-bye ! I will not look at you again. And here's the one that Mr. Charlton gave me when I wrote papa, and

asked him to come home to us. But I wish now I hadn't written it. The gold is redder than the rest, and always make me think of blood."

Her father thinks it best to disappear.

" Sometime I'll tell mamma about my writing to papa, but I'm afraid to tell her that I did. — Some one is coming ! I must cover these ! "

Her father enters now as if from Heaven,
Bearing smiles which would all Sheol leaven:—

" Papa, I wish you wouldn't ask mamma for money any more."

Each smile dies out with her exploded rocket:—

" Why not ? "

Proceeds to take a letter from his pocket;
Dampens a blotting pad; lays over seal;
Places on shelf; weights, and turns on his heel.

" Because she has to work so hard to pay for all these rooms, for what we eat, and for the clothes we wear. Now please don't go to her for money any more.—I'd rather give you mine ! "

" Yours ! how much have you got ? "

" Ever so many gold pieces."

" Nickels, you mean. I don't believe they're gold."

" Mamma said that they were."

" I'll tell you if they are."

" Well, — "

Gladys reluctantly uncovers them:
A love of gold a father's feelings stem:—

" Phew ! Sixty dollars ! I don't think you love your father and your mother much, if, when you know they're bothered about money matters, you can hide away this wealth, and will give them no help at all with it."

Gladys to the heart is stung
With the dart her father flung:—

"Ever and ever so many times I've poured it out in mamma's lap, and said, 'Please use it. I would love so much to have you use it.' But she said that it was mine, and wanted me to keep it for myself."

She stops—looks at it longingly,
Until her tearful eyes no more can see:—

"If you will use it—it is yours to do with what you like."

Again that cursed love of gold
Makes the father's love grow cold:—

"Well, I will take it for a loan, and just as soon as I can find employment, I'll replace it — put two pieces in for every one that I take out.—Perhaps it would be better not to tell your mother, dear."

"I shall *not* tell mamma!"

And as only a child can *cry,*
She leaves him,—sobbing to his sigh,--

"Oh, well, we cannot cook a meal without a fire! — I guess the seal is soaked enough to loosen now. (*Opens letter — takes out check*—) One thousand dollars! Phew! I am in luck. (*He looks at the beginning and the end.*) 'England—Roger Charlton,—let's see about this thing! (*Reads.*) 'I've been a stranger since we parted just one year ago, in order to allow your life to drift away from mine,

But still yours is the form which clings
About me, till its trembling wings
Of love are drooping in my melancholy eye;
Yet in my mind's uncertain light,
Dull doubts deny that I am right
In still believing that it shares
The love I feel, or that it cares
For the desires which, slumbering, deep within me lie.'

"Young man your love had better slumber till I die. 'I write you principally to verify what probably already is well known; that Robert Kent no longer lives upon this earth.'

"Oh, I remember! Mrs. Townsend said that Roger Charlton was the fiend who bargained for my hand.

"'Further than the fact that Robert Kent has died, I need not state, for I presume his death was learned upon your application for divorce, as both were nearly simultaneous.'

"Had Margaret applied for a divorce? I knew it not.—'Under a *nom de plume*, I have just published my own poems in book form. As every sentiment expressed in them relates in some way to the love I have for you, I wish you to accept my interest in the copyright, and overcome your modesty regarding the acceptance of financial help you have not worked to earn, by realizing that the poems would not have been written if it had not been for you; as no one else could have called forth from me the sentiments therein expressed. Should you not wish, however, to appropriate the proceeds as your own, I have so left the matter with the publishers, that Gladys will receive the profits when she is of age. The enclosed check is from the publishers for one-half interest in the copyright, and in the future there should be a somewhat steady income from the royalties, which has all been arranged in such a manner with the publishers, that you hereafter will transact all business with them.'

"As Uncle Olney used to say, 'Now that I'm getting old, I sometimes think that Providence provides for me

when I cannot:' for Margaret repeatedly has said that she would not accept one penny which she didn't earn, and I am sure that she would not accept as much as this; and as to Gladys,—I might just as well be using it as have it lying in the bank until she is of age, and when she is, I can return it all. A little clever management, and Margaret need never know of it; —and I am safe with Roger Charlton, for he adds, 'I shall not write again, and will conceal my whereabouts. Believing that my power to aid your happiness is exhausted, I must still allow our lives to further drift apart, well knowing that our marriage, Margaret, can never be.'"

Robert thinks· George enters with a card,
And Robert scans it with a strange regard:—

"'Robert Olney Kent!' My uncle! Why, he's dead. It may be some relation who has come here to dispute the will whereby one-half his fortune was bequeathed to Margaret! Well, let the gentleman come in."

George exits.
Robert places Charlton's letter,
For the lack of some place better,
'Gainst his breast inside his collar,
And begins to sport a dollar.
Enter George, announcing Dr. Walton
As "Robert Kent," but feeling that a fault on
Some one's part must surely have been made,
Gives Rob the card, and goes out to his trade.
Robert looks at Walton in surprise:—

"Am I gazing in a mirror, sir? — Is your name 'Robert Olney Kent?'"

Walton stares at Robert and replies:—

"Those are the words by which they christened me."

Robert wonders at the paradox:—

" But that is my name, sir ! "

This statement Walton evidently shocks:—

" I thought you blew yourself to pieces with a bomb-shell at your doorstep just a year ago !—I must have been mistaken when I thought that it was you, and ever since then I have been away, so my mistake has not been rectified.—Yet I persist, my name is ' Robert Olney Kent.' "

Robert looks Walton straight in the eye:—

" Whose fault is it that mine is just the same ? "

And Walton coolly gives him the reply:—

" But yours is not the same."

Robert asks him, somewhat in alarm:—

" Don't I know my own name ? "

And Walton calmly waves at him his arm:—

" Not if you call mine yours."

Robert looks at him still more alarmed:—

" It is the name by which they christened me."

And Walton with the subject grows more charmed:—

" Perhaps you recollect the minister who christened you ?"

Robert waves a handless arm at him:—

" No bullying ! no bull-dozing, sir."

Cool Walton asks, as Robert's face grows grim:—

" Did Mrs. Townsend ever say she saw you christened? "

" No. Suppose she did? "

" You would then hear about the ' H English ' minister who christened you, and of the Boston minister who christened me. The ' H English ' minister could not pronounce your middle name without an ' H '; hence you were christened, ' Robert Holney Kent,' while I was christened ' Robert Olney Kent.' ' *Holney*,' ' *Olney*,' is the difference 'tween our legal signatures.

Which one is written here in Margaret's 'Certificate of Marriage' with the same ?"

Robert reads, somewhat against his will:—

"'Robert Olney Kent.'"

Walton remarks, while both their natures thrill:—

"That is my legal signature ; not yours."

"I'll give you just three minutes to clear out !"

And Robert draws an ugly-looking knife.

"I'll give you till I've counted four to put that weapon down."

And Walton, with a pistol, threats his life.

"I've faced such threats too many times to be afraid."

But Robert says it with a nervous twitch.
Light Walton counts, unswerving in his aim:—

"One — two — three — "

Robert slashes like a willow switch,
The knife:—cross Walton's wrist it came,
Quite severing it: both knife and pistol drop,
While Robert adds, to justify his act:—

"Once, sir, I gave *my* hand to save my life ; now you have given *yours*."

But Walton is not ready yet to stop:—

"Your life is not yet saved !"

Both, by a common impulse backed,
Dive down: the weapons get exchanged,
And Walton rises like a fiend deranged:—

"I have another hand !"

And with the knife stabs Robert in the breast.
Robert uttering one sharp cry,—
Muttering—

"And so have I."

Fires at Walton: both sink into rest.

* * * * *

Miss Longstaffe and Gladys enters,
With pale Margaret in the center.
Coolly viewing Robert Kent,

Miss L—— speaks, with slow accent:—

"Margaret, I think you are at last released, if your own strength *has* failed."

Margaret, with a weird spell bound,
Tears Kent's clothing from the wound.
Finding Charlton's letter there,
She gives it to Gladys' care:—

"No! no! he is not dead! He breathes!"

Margaret, with eyes closed in prayer,
Does not see her husband raise
On his arm and at her stare,
While she for his death thus prays:—

"O God! if Divine Providence supplied his life, provide now for his death, and take him into Hell, for he would find his Heaven there. Until his death I'll be his slave, but after death let him serve bondage to himself, alone. Our souls have never been united, yet our bodies have been bound together with a chain I have not had the strength to break. I've always thought 'twas noble not to try, and I've just proven that I think it still. O God, do now for me what I can never do: release me from his loathed embrace."

As Charlton wished, Kent's soul was softened well,
Until he realized he was in Hell:—

"There is no God, but you shall be released."

A bullet choked the words, and his life ceased:—

* * * * * *

Margaret sees the crime of her harsh prayer,
And throws her arms around him in despair:—

"He has been wronged! Until you show that his was not true love for me, by proving that he gave affection to some other woman as his wife, consider I am still the wife of Robert Kent."

Walton rises from the place he lay,
And wild with his pain, manages to say:—

"And please consider *I* am Robert Kent! And that you have decided 'merely passionate affection for *one* woman constitutes true love.'—I can give proof that I am 'Robert Olney Kent,' and that *that* man's true legal name is not. Hence by this paper, you have married me."

Margaret views the paper with high scorn,
While Gladys to the side of Kent is borne:—

"'What constitutes a marriage? Verbal laws?'"

She asks Walton: continuing as she draws
Kent closer to her side with ebbing life:—

"This child is witness that we two are man and wife."

ACT V

We visit Margaret's Country Home again.
Her once æsthetic tastes have grown too plain.
The walls about the room are nearly bare;
She now lies sick in bed 'neath Gladys' care.
Miss Longstaffe enters with her face more grim,
And out of breath exclaims:—

"I have found him!"

"Found whom?"

"The man who loved and then deserted you."

"Found Dr. Walton?"

"I also have found it!"

"Found what?"

"The proof that Robert Kent divorced himself from you by giving his affection to another woman as his wife. I will bring Dr. Walton and the proof to you."

She leaves, and through an open door
Dr. Walton stands before:—

"I've come, never, never to leave you again, if you will let me stay!"

And they embrace.—Weakness seems to prevent her
From answering him,—but she saw Charlton enter:—

"Oh, Roger Charlton, I've forgotten you!"

She exclaims it with closed eyes.
Pale Charlton sadly replies:—

"We sometimes disremember, but we never do forget."

Miss Longstaffe enters, bringing after her,

Florence and Mrs. Townsend—things which were.—
Charlton speaks with humbled head,
Wishing that he could be dead:—

"While your arms hold him to your breast, my arms are impotent, and while the lips of Mrs. Townsend denounce me, my own lips will be dumb. Clasp on, and I will turn my eyes away; speak on, and I'll be deaf to what you say."

Mrs. T——— still plays the hypocrite:—

"My lips are dumb when they would denounce you."

Walton says aside, that none hear it:—

"(Oh, Margaret, you are so homely now!)"

And fascinated by a thing of beauty,
Addresses Florence as a courteous duty.
Charlton, at the quickly changed aspects,
Addresses Margaret as his love directs:—

"Then my own lips can speak, since that man has spurned you. Margaret, when I had seen the scoundrel, Robert Kent, in sporting clubs, making a toy of that which should have bought you bread, and when his selfish appetites had been appeased, returning to your sleepless couch a gluttonous beast: when I knew such *had* been your married life with him and would still be if he returned to you from South America, I interposed my true love 'tween you and that beastly man, although the murder vomited his filthy life upon my soul. I never knew the details of his death, and yet I could tell what would deafen you to hear. I took the life of Robert Kent into my hands because I wished to gain *your* happiness, but now, to gain *my* happiness, I must take mine, and go for Judgment to the God of each."

At which he draws out a revolver:—

"You didn't kill him, Charlton! Stop!"
Miss Longstaffe has fired a "dissolver."
Charlton gives her an astonished look;
Florence gave some cue which Walton took:—
"Let's have some explanations! This lovely woman will tell who she is."
Florence sweetly above Margaret stands:—
"I am till death the wife of Robert Kent."
And to Walton a marriage paper hands.
On Mrs. Townsend Walton's eye is bent
As he exclaims,—
"And I am Robert Kent!"
To Florence he extends a handless arm,—
Embracing her; which does material harm
To Mrs. Townsend's scheme, since her hard strife
Had been to gain him Margaret for a wife,
And armed with proof for that she had here come:—
But now concludes;—
"And I to lies am dumb."
Miss Longstaffe takes down, framed, from off the wall,
Poor Margaret's marriage paper,—with the call of—
"Robert Olney Kent, I charge you, sir, with bigamy."
Florence quickly writhes from out his arms;
But Margaret tries to quiet his alarms
By pointing at Gladys:—
"No, I am not your wife."
"Because you're not my father, sir."
The fife-like voice supports her mother's tones.
Addressing Florence,—Margaret he disowns:—
"I never loved that woman as my wife."
And Margaret falls back with no seeming life.
Charlton's fist in Walton's face is sent:—
"I thought that I had killed you, Robert Kent!"
With which, to Margaret is quickly said,
As with an effort she sits up in bed:—
"What power chained you to Robert Kent for life?"

"The thought that parents should be man and wife."
And having weakly spoken; she falls back
With her face drawn "as though the flesh would crack."
"You have been *his* wife in this world, but in the next—"
Charlton pauses—Margaret tries to speak:— is vexed.
"Her tongue is paralyzed!"
Miss Longstaffe cries;
And all but Charlton stand in dumb surprise.
He hands to her a pencil and a paper,
And quickly asks—as flickers her life's taper:—
"You have been his wife in this world, but in the next?—"
And Margaret writes—while Charlton seems unsexed:—
"'My lover will be he who had the truest love.'"
He reads, while Margaret is withdrawing from life's glove—
"Stand back!" *(As Miss Longstaffe upon him bears:—)*
"Let no one meddle with my soul's affairs."
To Margaret then:—
"What constitutes true love?"
And Margaret, struggling, tries to speak,—
Then write,—then calmly drops life's glove.
———But crazy Charlton still repeats:—

"What Constitutes True Love?"

* * * * * *

* * * * *

Charlton, waking from his sleep
Whereof we this record keep—
Where this Dream had left him maddened—
Since the Dream's recorded ending

O'er a poem has been bending;
And, Reader, you will be saddened
With its contents: but, imploring
Pardon for my faults ignoring,—
I end *my work with a sigh.*
—Let who can do better try.

Julius—

(IN PREPARATION)

THE TRAGEDY OF ERRORS

A POEM

By CHARLTON

Being a continuation in the next world of the Dream so poorly portrayed by Julius in the Dramatic Poem of the same title

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